Review of Derrick Jensen´s book "Endgame, vol.2: Resistance" (2006)

(translated from swedish from a blogpost on www.universalist.blogg.se)

The American author Derrick Jensen is maybe the most known and popular anarchoprimitivist today, and is one of those who has written most books (about ten). He is one of the founders of Deep Green Resistance, a radical environmental organization for the dismantling of civilization. Jensen is one of the philosophers of the modern anarchoprimitivistic movement, besides John Zerzan, among others, and one I have been influenced by before I read this book, which is the first of his books I have read.

Jensen´s book is the most dangerous one I´ve ever read, one of the most activistic and guerilla- and partisanlike books I´ve ever read. You don´t need to interpret this in a negative sense. It´s also one of the books that has challenged my thinking most. I have really wrestled with it. It was also long, 929 pages, of which I only read the second part, of about 410 pages. The first part I have not been able to get hold of, but I will read it when I get hold of it.

In short the book is about us having to dismantle civilization if we shall save nature from destruction through for example climate change. Civilization threatens both the survival of nature and of humanity. If we really shall succeed with such a dismantling, according to Jensen, it doesn´t work to be a pacifist, but we have to be smart and use all possible means, both violent ones and nonviolent ones. We have to sabotage the System, sabotage the infrastructure that supports the death machinery, blow the dams which exterminate salmon, hack into the computer systems of the nature murderers in order to sabotage them, yes not just defend ourselves, but attack the System, again and again, simply bleed it out.

Derrick Jensen doesn´t hide the fact that his foremost inspirers are the Native Americans in their defence struggle against the white intruders. And just as they weren´t pacifists, he equally isn´t. He feels himself allied with their struggle, and learns from it.

I have called myself radicalpacifist formerly on this blog, but this doesn´t mean that I would disassocitate myself from all violence whatsoever. This simply isn´t possible, and it´s a self-deception to think that it is. No pacifist I know of wants murderers and rapists to go unpunished, but they believe that they have to get their prison sentences, if not for other things, so to prevent and deter from new crimes. Then pacifism is at once modified. My radicalpacifism acknowledges this, and its radicality is not to disassociate from all violence whatsoever, but to do things that minimize violence in our world (as a totality, now and for all time) whether it is against animals, nature or the poor, abstain from all **unnecessary** violence, and then a lot has to be abandoned, because we live in a society that systematically abuses life, and this **without it being necessary at all**. This pacifists often do not see. The word ”pacifism” is incredibly misused, and exploited by the powerful to kill all resistance against them (Jensen points this out himself). One is allowed to kill a mosquito, but not Hitler or Stalin. What a hypocrisy! Then I consider it more pacifistic to kill Hitler and Stalin, but to save the mosquito, who is innocent like an angel. One really doesn´t have to kill the mosquito. Provide a mosquito net instead! But the pacifists today are possessed by the thought that one isn´t

allowed to use violence upward in the hierarchy, but on the other hand they are surprisingly blind to all the violence they exercise downward in the hierarchy, against the poor of the third world, against the animals and nature, a violence that they often don´t notice, because it´s indirect. This Derrick Jensen can´t stand, who abhors attacking the weak, but does not shy away from challenging the strong ones to a duel, those who oppress the weak and besides have weapons to defend themselves with. Chivalry, thus!

But how far is Jensen willing to go in the use of violence? It isn´t clear in the book. Does he want a bloody revolution, an ”ecological French revolution”*? I know he is an anarchist, but bloody revolutions tend to create new structures of oppression, when everyone who opposes them are imprisoned or executed. How else is it going to happen? To unseat and murder the oppressors and prevent them from further dominion would demand military organization and police force, that is, the center of civilization. Here the pacifistic tradition has a wisdom which builds on experiences of many revolutions. Maybe nonviolence and modified anarchopacifism (leaning towards radicalpacifism) is more undermining of civilization than military coups and bloody revolutions, which more have the chance of creating counterattacks, militarism, police states and world wars than dismantling civilization? Wars which can degenerate into nuclear wars?

What would happen for example if Putin would get an environmental ethics awakening, and would begin to make war against Trump because he has read Jensen, and realized that America leads the world towards destruction, and he then rushs the world into a third world war, where Trump attacks Russia with nuclear bombs? To vehemently advocate violence can get unimagined consequences.

Is Jensen really willing to do "whatever it takes to stop it (the destruction of nature)" (look at page 829)? Would he torture people to be able to carry this through? Here we face ethical problems. I personally would never torture. I think it´s contra productive and among the worst things a human can do. Nothing can justify torture. There is a lot better ways to make war for nature.

Jensen has no clear plan for how we shall dismantle civilization so that we minimize suffering for humans and animals, how we dismantle it from inside, so that we avoid violent collapse and chaos.

I have also a feeling that Jensen demands too much of environmental activists. It’s evident that he has never been in jail or endured compulsory psychiatric treatment in a psychiatric department or a forensic psychiatric jail. Shall we seek martyrdom? Shall we try to repeat the mythical sacrifice act of Jesus? It is like a suicide to resist the System in the violent way that Jensen so eagerly advocates, a fact that some Native Americans acknowledged in their fight against the whites (Jensen tells about this in the book). If for example a former psychiatric patient like me would engage in ecosabotage, the way would not be long to long-lasting visits to forensic psychiatric jails, the small hells of civilization. I have become so ruined by psychiatry that I would not dare to tempt fate further. To demand such things from me I would consider an unjustifiable cruelty. Enough is enough. Victims of the torture of the System have to get a free ticket here, one doesn´t walk into the lion´s den after such things. Civilization´s torment of the deviants is so big as regard to the psychiatric patients, that I suggest that they shouldn´t be encouraged to ecosabotage. However, those who are willing to risk ordinary imprisonment, those who have no psychiatric past, with them it´s another matter. The ordinary penal system is, according to my experience (I have short experience of it), more merciful than the psychiatric care, because it doesn´t abuse one´s emotional life and one´s psyche with poisons.

Jensen doesn´t appear to acknowledge so much the value of changing the system more from inside, through nonviolent infiltration and popular education, which I consider being one of the strongest weapons we have against civilization. I consider it better to work full-time with nonviolent methods – really **give everything** in this, stake everything on this – than to work limitedly with violent methods (no one dares anyway to work full-time with violent ecosabotage). Indeed Jensen advocates both, but if we shall stake on something, I suggest it´s more effective to go the nonviolent way, because we then avoid the risk of wasting a lot of years in captivity, when we cannot do anything. We don´t have to violently blow up dams, we can also through infiltration and lobbying get people to do it deliberately, or with the help of the law. Yes we really can law-regulate our way back to nature, if we are really smart, like for example Pella Thiel and other fighters for the rights of nature already do. This has a great impact. We namely have morality on our side, and the law has at last to admit that, admit that it can´t any longer encourage that we are sawing off the branch we are sitting on, but that we have to have the right to live as the wild indigenous people, have the right to restore nature.

Jensen is in the book an exceptionally strong advocate of the rights of salmon, and that we ought to blow up the incredibly many dams for hydroelectric power that are built in creeks and rivers around the world (only in USA there are two million dams). Jensen wants to take the law into his own hands and blow them up without the sanction of the law, before it´s too late and the salmon in creeks and rivers can´t recover. The salmon is dependent on being able to swim upstreams to spawn. However, the one who constantly blows up dams has to reckon in that he/she risks long-lasting prison sentences, especially if the floods that these blowouts cause downstreams destroy a lot of settlements and if humans are hurt thereby. Then we lose our best warriors for long times. I suggest we have to destroy the dams, but I would call upon Jensen to try all ways out before we risk to sacrifice our best warriors to long-lasting prison sentences. He never speaks about fish ladders, ways to help the fishes to swim past dams. Maybe this is a golden mean until we get the law on our side? This silence is peculiar, because Jensen seems to be very well-read concerning salmons, their survival and the threats against it. I would like to know what Jensen thinks about fish ladders, if they are worth anything at all? This could prevent many prison sentences.

Is Jensen´s big confidence in violence an American phenomenon? Would a Derrick Jensen be possible in Gandhi´s India? Has Jensen watched too many American action movies? Too great admiration of violent heroes? We really can perform better than the violence heroes of the movies. We have to minimize violence, to avoid war, revenge and spirals of violence. This is what I think has been the point of pacifism throughout the ages, not to totally refrain from all violence, always and everywhere. Yes, why doesn´t Jensen bring up the usual pacifistic objection to violence, that violence begets violence, leads to spirals of violence? He brings up many objections, but not this maybe most important objection.

Jensen goes too far when he close to encourages women who are exposed to rape, to murder their perpetrators. Is death penalty really a proportional punishment for rape? Two to six years of prison feels reasonable. Here it begins to smell burnt around Jensen, a naive glorification of violence. Who becomes the next one to revenge the murder of the rapist? And then you have the carousel running. However, I don´t mean that women don´t have the right to defend themselves against rapists.

Jensen brings up the objection about how we shall dismantle nuclear power if we shall dismantle civilization, and he admits that he has not got the answer to this, but that the best one can do is to immediately begin to dismantle all nuclear power plants on this earth, to minimize the catastrophes. I totally agree.

Jensen also punctuates the myth about the ”Pleistocene overkill”, that we would have driven a lot of species to extinction through excessive hunting during the Stone Age, before civilization arose. A myth that people who want to blacken the indigenous people use to point out that they were as destructive as ourselves. A myth that I believed in before I read Jensen´s book. Jensen doesn´t believe in it. It´s totally impossible, he suggests, there are no archeological evidence for it, it would have been too much meat per person, according to scientists he quotes. If you want to know more about the debate about this, just google ”Pleistocene overkill”.

Jensen has not a word about asceticism and deliberate poverty as one solution to the environmental problems. If something is going to save the world, it´s this. Surely, politics is needed, ecosabotage is needed, but who talks about that asceticism is ecosabotage, and furthermore maybe the most effective, because everyone can imitate without being afraid of prison sentences? Yes, a world full of secular or religious sadhu-like ascetics would mean the death penalty for civilization, the total collapse of civilization, because it builds on systematic luxury and convenience mania. I remember reading that Jensen has both a car and a personal computer, which made me sad, because it is here the battle is played out, that we have to refrain from high technology, and make the government prohibit it. As important or more important than to blow up dams, actually. Our example here is crucial.

But Jensen makes one think thoroughly about these things, because he gets to the bottom of them, he takes the nature destruction so seriously, and is so passionate and wholehearted. Thank you Derrick for this! He is also brave who dares to write such a radical and dangerous book as this, but I have a feeling that he himself would not risk imprisonment for ecosabotage (as he also admits in the book).

Here is an insightful critical review of Jensen´s both two Endgame-books.

* One gets the idea that he would be able to accept somehing like that when he says that we have to do "whatever it takes to stop it (nature destruction)". What is more effective in stopping nature destruction than a state coup? Jensen never criticize ecofascism in his book, and bloody ecorevolutions could very easily lead to ecofascist-regimes. However, even ecofascism is better than the horrible capitalistic technofascism, where fascism has reached proportions never reached before.